

Ohio State Head Coach Jake Diebler Says Team Is Starting To Gel Together, Hit Stride



After losing four of its first five conference games in January, it seems Ohio State has begun to turn the corner on its 2024-25 season.

Since a heartbreaking 77-76 overtime loss at home to teetering Indiana on Jan. 17, the Buckeyes have racked up two impressive consecutive victories, first a statement comeback win at No. 11 Purdue last Tuesday and then a dominant 82-65 win over Iowa Monday night.

It's a strong two-game stretch that has allowed Jake Diebler's team to not only move up the Big Ten standings — where they currently sit in 10th place — but re-enter NCAA tournament consideration, still standing as ESPN "Bracketologist" Joe Lunardi's "Last Four In" in his latest projected bracket.

Ohio State's winning stretch has been defined by improved efficiency on both sides of the floor, one which currently has it ranking 42nd nationally in offensive rating by KenPom (116.3 points per 100 possessions) and 26th in defensive rating (96.0 points allowed per 100 possessions).

It's a crisper style of play for the Scarlet and Gray that Diebler said is attributed to his new team coming together as one unit and growing more comfortable in his system.

"I think what we're starting to see now is — and sometimes I forget this is — it takes time as you put in a new system, guys are experiencing it for the first time," Diebler said on Jan. 28. "You want immediate results, but it takes time. What we're seeing now is guys are more comfortable. Our attention to detail, because of the experience, is better.

"You forget that as a coach. Because you want it now. (It's like), 'Well, we just practiced that, why is it not (translating to games),' but it takes time to build. We're at a point where guys — we've grown, we've built, now we can kind of play off instincts, and it's helping."

As Diebler alluded to, many players on Ohio State's roster have had to adjust to an entirely new system with new teammates, with 2024-25 additions like incoming transfers Aaron Bradshaw, Micah Parrish and Sean Stewart and incoming freshman John Mobley Jr. and Ivan Njegovan all in their first year with the Buckeyes.

But with three months of play now under their belts with Ohio State, Diebler said his players are finally starting to play like one cohesive and comfortable unit, allowing them to act more with their instincts on the court rather than thinking.

"Now we're starting to see more instinctual plays," Diebler said. "Sean Stewart steals, some of Evan Mahaffey's blocks. Devin Royal's gotten more experience on the perimeter guarding, he had some good moments (in Ohio States 82-65 win over Iowa on Jan. 27). .."

"We're getting better and better. There's so much newness. New system, new team, new staff. And you're seeing just how committed our guys are to growing and getting better, and we're starting to see the fruits of that labor."